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Approval ratings for members of Congress are at an all-time low. Only 11 percent of the American public approves of how Congress conducts itself, according to a December Gallup poll. That is the lowest rating Gallup has recorded in more than 35 years of polling Americans on the job approval of Congress.

I agree that we need to reform and improve Congress. Since I started representing Colorado's 6th Congressional District in 2009, I have been a leader in the fight to reform Congress by starting and co-chairing the first bipartisan Balanced Budget Amendment Caucus, introducing legislation to cut congressional pay and budgets, introducing legislation to end the congressional pension system, introducing legislation to end the system of automatic pay raises for members of Congress, and introducing a constitutional amendment for mandatory term limits.

Balanced Budget Amendment. In 2010, I founded the Balanced Budget Amendment Caucus in the U.S. House to strip the power away from the federal government to continually spend money that we do not have and put an end to decades of reckless out-of-control spending that is undermining both the national and economic security of our nation.

Colorado, along with 48 other states, has a balanced budget requirement in our state constitution, forcing legislators to work together to determine what the spending priorities are within the resources available. No such requirement exists in Washington, D.C. I believe that if one did, the motivation for members of Congress to get the work done would be greatly improved.

Cut congressional budgets and pay. In 2010 and again in 2011, I introduced bills (House Resolution 6134 and HR 270) to cut congressional pay by 10 percent and reduce office budgets by at least 4 percent. A 5 percent reduction in congressional budgets was adopted as part of updated rules enacted by the new GOP-led Congress in January 2011.

End automatic raises for members of Congress. When Congress passed the Ethics Reform Act of 1989, federal lawmakers approved a provision in that bill that made their annual pay raises automatic.

The legislation I introduced in mid-December (HR 3673) would put an end to automatic pay increases by requiring a recorded vote on any salary increase that members of Congress want to give themselves. Requiring recorded votes on pay increases will not only make the actions of Congress more transparent, but it will also make it more accountable.

Abolish congressional pensions. Last September, I introduced HR 2913, which would terminate the defined benefit pension plan available to members of Congress. It is important for members of Congress to demonstrate that we have "skin in the game" with them during these challenging economic times by eliminating a benefit not available to the vast majority of Americans.

Mandatory term limits. According to U.S. Term Limits, a non-profit group that advocates for term limits at all levels of government, 37 states have some form of term limits for their governors and other statewide offices, while voters in 15 states, including Colorado, have overwhelming approved term limits for state legislatures as well. Even the president is subject to term limits. My proposed constitutional amendment (House Joint Resolution 93), introduced last month, would limit members of Congress to no more than 12 years in the Senate and 12 years in the House. I believe that would make Congress more responsive to the needs of our country.

I believe that all of these proposals have a chance of being passed. As we can see by poll numbers, Americans are demanding improvements in the way Congress operates. These are the types of bills that the majority of Congress may not necessarily want to pass but will feel enormous pressure from their constituents to support — or risk losing their seats.

By Rep. Mike Coffman
[The Denver Post](#)
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